

Field-grown Cut Flowers

Introduction

Cut flowers can include not only fresh and dried flowers, but also any plant part used for floral or decorative purposes, such as seed heads, stalks and woody cuts. There are numerous annuals, perennials, woody plants, and ornamental grasses that can be grown commercially for these purposes.

Marketing

The market constantly shifts as consumer preferences change. Growers must be willing to adjust their production to meet these demands. Potential retail outlets include farmers' markets, roadside stands, and U-pick. Wholesale options include supermarkets, garden centers, and craft stores. Marketing difficult-to-find or unusual cuts to retail and wholesale florists is also a possibility. Hotels, restaurants, caterers and the Internet may offer other marketing opportunities. Growers should develop several different marketing avenues.

Market Outlook

The demand for cut flowers has been increasing since the early 1990s. Much of the cut flower industry has shifted to South America where labor costs are considerably cheaper. While it can be difficult to break into current markets, such as wholesale florists, there is a niche for uncommon cut flowers grown in Kentucky. Local growers can have a marketing edge if they are able to provide the hard-to-find and difficult-to-ship specialty flowers. In addition, locally produced flowers are fresher than those shipped from distant markets.



Production Considerations

Site selection and planting

The grower will need to be familiar with the different production and harvest requirements of a diverse group of plant material. In general, cut flowers prefer fertile, well drained soil and full sun throughout the day. Many producers prefer growing plants in 4- to 6-inch raised beds to improve drainage and ease harvest. A source of water for trickle irrigation is essential to production. Some cut flowers will require support in order to prevent lodging and to ensure straight stems.

Planting dates depend upon the market and type of plant being grown. Annuals are planted as soon as all danger of frost has passed in the spring and staggered plantings are common. Because transplants come into flower sooner than direct-seeded plants, growers may choose to use transplants to capture the early market and then direct-seed later plantings. Transplants can be started in a greenhouse or cold frame or they may be purchased from a supplier. High tunnels have been successfully



used to extend the cut flower season. Biennials and perennials are generally planted in the fall for spring flower production.

Pest management

The most common pest problems encountered include aphids, leafhoppers, mites and thrips. Disease problems include foliar bacterial and fungal leaf spots, powdery mildew, and root rots. Following good cultural practices is the best means of controlling these problems. Weed control is critical since competition from weeds not only reduces plant quality and quantity, but also raises labor costs by increasing the time needed for harvest. Many growers use few pesticides, if any.

Harvest and storage

The proper stage of harvest will depend upon a number of factors including type of market, cultivar, distance to market and intended use. Once harvested, stems are placed in a bucket of water containing floral preservative. Harvested flowers should then be placed in a cooled area or cooler until sold. Floral preservative and refrigeration are essential to keeping flowers fresh and extending their shelf and vase life.

Labor requirements

Cut flower production is labor and management intensive. Planting, weeding and harvesting all require trained labor. Crops which flower all at once, such as daffodils or tulips, will require the instant availability of additional laborers during harvest.

Economic Considerations

Field-grown cut flowers offer a means of entering the floriculture industry without the capital investment and overhead necessary for some greenhouse crops. According to information provided by ATTRA (2000), growing a half acre of flowers can yield a gross income of \$15,000.

Many growers show a profit in their third year of production.

More Information

ON THE WEB

- Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers <http://www.ascfg.org>
- Commercial Specialty Cut Flower Production Harvest Systems, MF-2155 (Kansas State University, 1995) <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/hort2/MF2155.pdf>
- Dried and Fresh-cut Flowers (North Dakota State University, 1993) <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/alt-ag/flowers.htm>
- Fertilization of Field Grown Specialty Cut Flowers, MF-2154 (Kansas State, 1995) <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/hort2/MF2154.pdf>
- Field Grown Cut Flowers (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, British Columbia, Canada, 1996) <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/ornamentals/floriculture/fieldcut.pdf>
- Outdoor Specialty Cut Flowers *Internet links* (North Carolina State University) http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/floriculture/crop/crop_outdoor.htm
- Southeast Outdoor Cut Flower Manual (North Carolina State University, 2000) http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/floriculture/manuals/se_cut_flwr.pdf
- Specialty Cut Flower Production and Marketing (ATTRA, 2006) <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/cutflower.html>
- Specialty Cut Flowers, MF-1034 (Kansas State University, 1992) <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/hort2/MF1034.pdf>

IN PRINT

Specialty Cut Flowers by A. M. Armitage and Judy M. Laushman, 2nd edition. 2003. Timber Press. Portland, OR